

Migration and Populism in Europe

World Futurist Society

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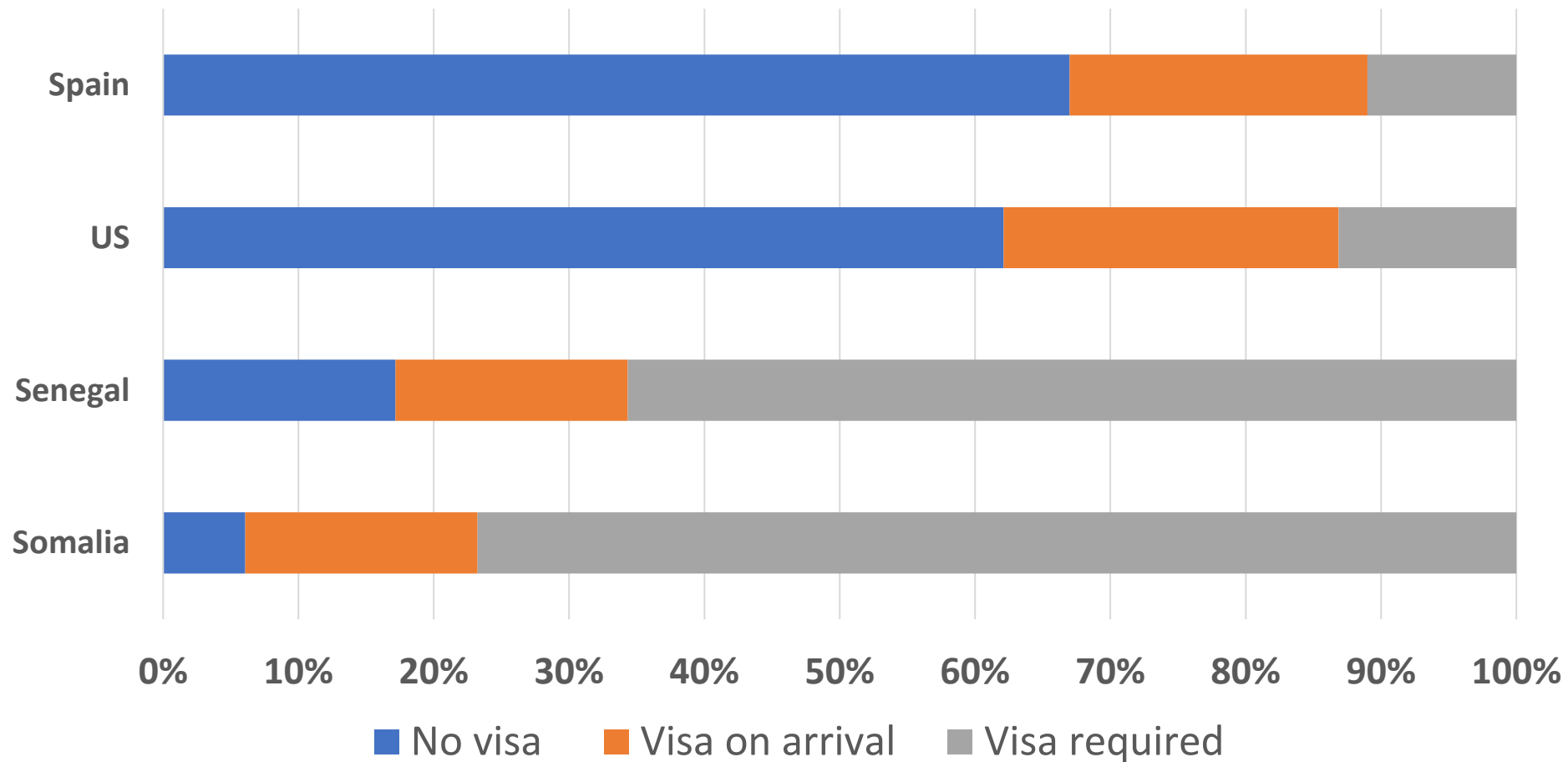
When it comes to migration,
politicians often:

- De-contextualize
- De-historicize
- Pathologize
- Demonize / de-humanize

Anyone who has nothing will not be respected... I migrated to escape poverty and stigmatization, to have something of my own such as a well-built house, a vehicle. [I want] to build a better future for me and my family, to no longer ask my relatives for things, to be independent of other people, because I am seen as a jinxed but poor person who cannot provide for the needs of my relatives.

-40-year-old Gambian migrant
in the Canary Islands

Passport power





Migration doesn't happen in a vacuum

- Product of global and historical forces
- Some things to consider:
 - What are Western businesses doing abroad?
 - To whom are our countries selling weapons?
 - What autocratic regimes do our governments support?
 - What are consequences of our foreign policy?
- For instance:
 - Senegalese migration towards the (Spanish) Canary Islands influenced by overfishing on the part of European trawlers, which in turn is supported by EU subsidies
 - US sanctions on Iran hitting the several million Afghan refugees hosted there disproportionately hard, spurring migration to Europe
 - Western purchases of oil from and sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia allowing them to wage war on the Houthis in Yemen, causing mass displacement

Migration and displacement in Europe

Migration

- Migration of Europeans to 'new world' – e.g. around 30 million people entering the US between 1861 and 1920 – mostly from Europe
- Industrial revolution – rural-urban migration and intra-European migration
- Colonial migration (Europeans going to live in their imperial holdings)
- Post-war labor migration -> intra-European migration as well as migration from colonies

Displacement

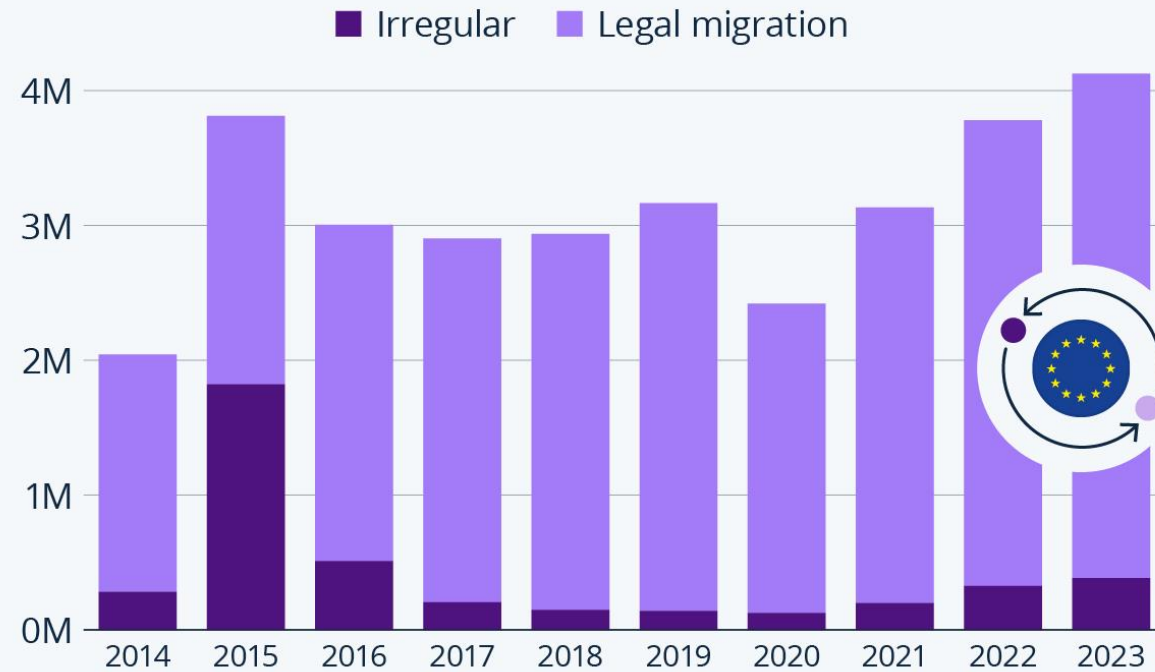
- 1920s: Greece/Turkey “population exchange” – displacement of 1.6 million
- **1940s: World War II – some 65 million people displaced, 11 million left displaced post-war**
- 1990: Balkans conflict – approximately 5 million displaced
- 2020s: war in Ukraine – almost 11 million displaced (7 million refugees, 4 million IDPs)

Key facts

- 44.7 million people born outside the EU lived in an EU country (10% of EU population) as of 1 January 2024
- 17.9 million people living in an EU country were born in another EU country as of 1 January 2024
- War in Ukraine – 4.3 million Ukrainians under temporary protection in EU
- European Union and migration
 - Schengen -> open borders and free movement
 - “Burden sharing” in the EU is a challenge
- “European migration ‘crisis’” – influx of around 1.3 million people in 2015

(Known) Irregular Entries Small Fraction of EU Migration

Number of people entering the EU legally and number of those registered entering irregularly, by year



Source: Eurostat



“Populist leaders typically maintain popular support by dramatising and scandalising existing or fabricated problems, crises, breakdowns or threats.”

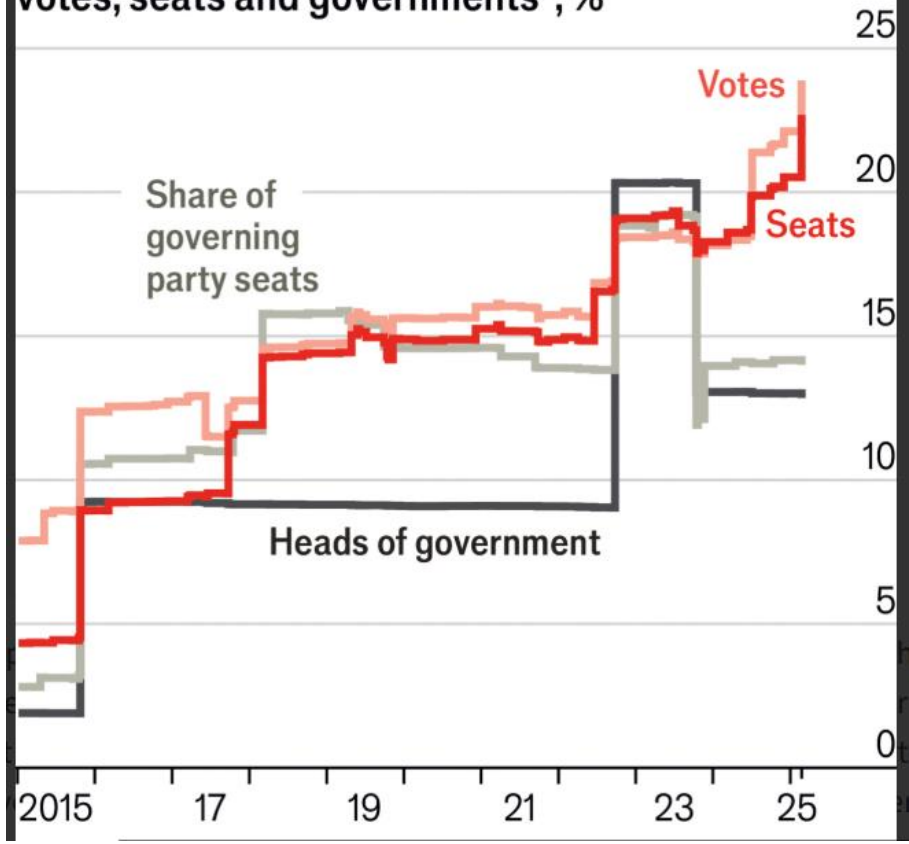
“In the EU, despite national variations, populist parties are characterised by their opposition to immigration, a concern for the protection of national culture and European civilisation, and adamant criticisms of globalisation, multiculturalism, the EU, representative democracy and mainstream political parties. They exploit a discourse of essentialised cultural differences, often conflated with religious and national differences.”

Populist advances

- As of Sept 2023 the Economist calculated that 15 of 27 EU countries had far-right parties showing 20% or greater support in opinion polls (this included all large countries except Spain).
- As of 2025, hard right parties with 24% of vote share among EU+ (EU, UK, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland).
- Populists pushing more centrist parties to adopt their rhetoric and policies -> e.g. Keir Starmer welcoming Italy's "remarkable progress" on migration + UK's new hardline asylum policy

Mind the gap

European democracies*, hard-right share of votes, seats and governments[†], %



So why now?

- **Economic anxiety and deprivation following the 2008/2009 financial crisis?** BUT, Europe is the richest it has ever been, and hard-right parties often gain significant support from the well-off.
- **Backlash following the ‘migrant crisis’ of 2015?** But the association between immigration and hard right support is actually not so strong.
 - In Germany where the far right AfD has been making great gains, much of its support is in areas with low immigration.
 - Ireland has one of the largest foreign born populations in Europe but no major hard-right party. And the opposite is true for Poland.

Populist voices

- “It changes cities, neighbourhoods, entire nations, until one day you feel like a stranger in your own home. Our duty is clear: protect Hungary, protect Europe” – Victor Orban, President of Hungary
- “Migrants are now wandering in our neighborhoods, around the train stations or in the slums, the cause for France of immense security and public hygiene problems. We are now becoming accustomed to terrorism.” – Marine Le Pen, Leader of the National Rally in the French Assembly
- “We must get Denmark back. A Denmark where there are no headscarves in schools. Where Danish is spoken in nursing homes. Where Danes are once again masters in their own house” – Morten Messerschmidt, Leader of the Danish People’s Party

“They are going to invade us. Then, there really will be unemployment,” said Christian Sobo, a retired building worker. “There is more help for them than for us, the French.”

His wife, Katia, chimed in, mentioning Adolf Hitler: “What he did was monstrous. But we need someone with as much force as him now.”



NON à une Suisse à 10 millions d'habitants !

Les conséquences de l'immigration de masse incontrôlée :

- ▶ Presque aucun logement à un prix abordable
- ▶ Les enfants suisses minoritaires dans les écoles
- ▶ Encore plus de criminalité importée
- ▶ Des coûts de plusieurs milliards de francs à cause du chaos de l'asile
- ▶ Toujours plus de constructions et de bétonnage
- ▶ Toujours plus d'embouteillages sur les routes
- ▶ Explosion des primes d'assurance maladie
- ▶ Bagarres violentes entre groupes d'étrangers rivaux

C'est le moment de dire STOP ! Nous ne voulons pas d'une Suisse à 10 millions d'habitants. Avec une immigration contrôlée, nous nous préservons, nous protégeons nos enfants et notre nature. Votre vote est décisif !

**Le 22 octobre, votez UDC !
Chaque voix compte !**





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“Europe is already in the midst of a global battle for labour that will only get fiercer as time passes.”

-Michael Spindelegger, Head of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development in Vienna.

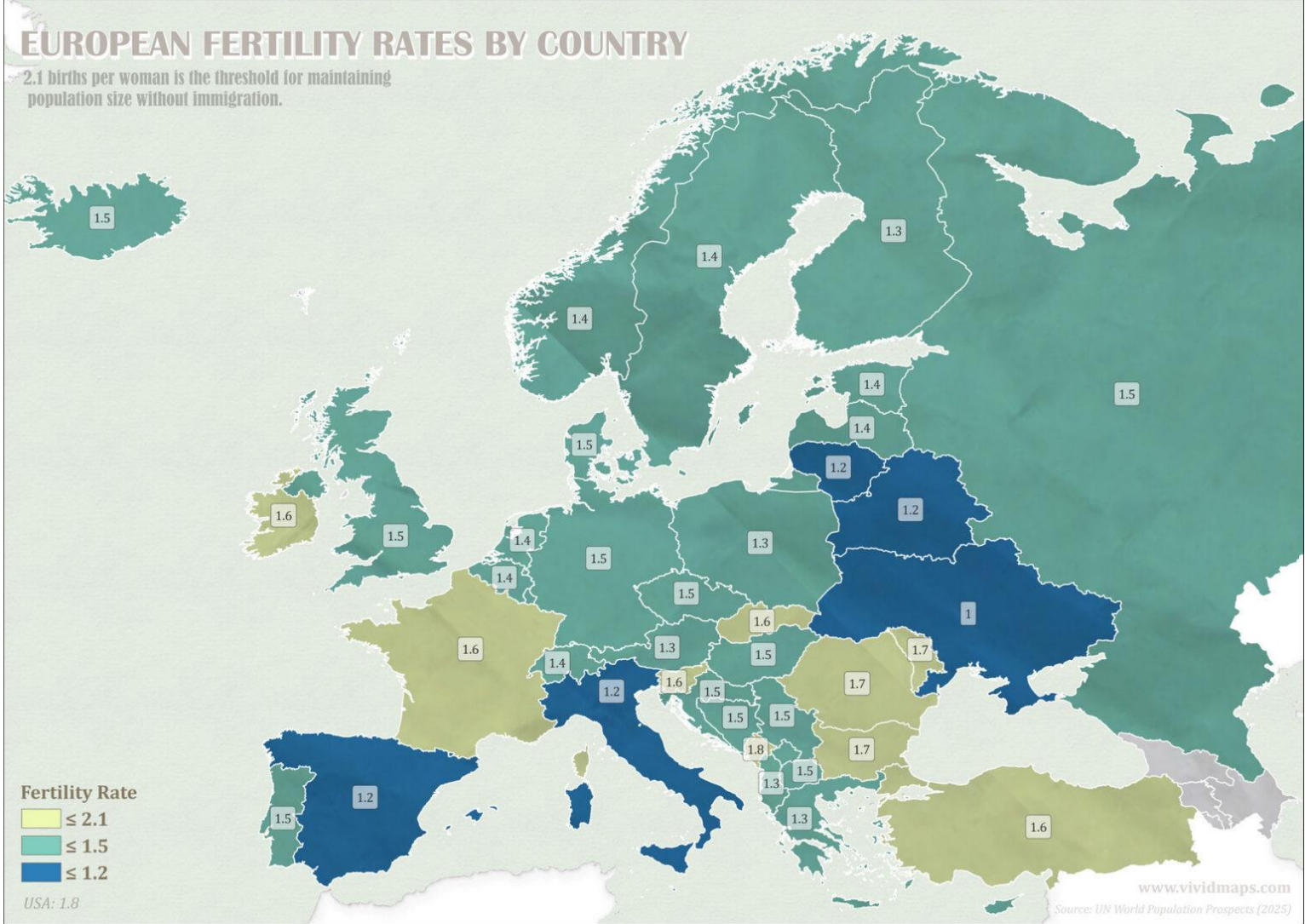
Labor market realities

- British businesses are reliant on low-cost foreign labor and have lobbied intensively to keep migration routes open. The U.K. care industry, for example, currently has around 130,000 vacancies. (WSJ May 2025)
- Italy has announced it will issue 425,000 work permits to non-EU nationals by 2025.
- Germany needs 400,000 foreign workers a year as baby-boomers retire; this is roughly the probable number of this year's asylum requests. (The Economist, Oct 2023)

Key industries relying on migrant labor

- **Agriculture and farming** (seasonal tasks like fruit picking and harvesting) - High reliance on unskilled and semi-skilled workers, especially from Eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia.
- **Construction and building** - Significant employment of unskilled and semi-skilled foreign workers, particularly in Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands
- **Manufacturing and industrial production**
- **Healthcare and elder-care** – Increased demand for foreign workers due to an aging population, especially in Germany, Sweden, and France.
- **Hospitality and tourism** – Significant employment of foreign workers to meet seasonal and year-round demands.

Demographic realities



Tactics – not just of the hard right

- Maritime patrols + pushback of migrant boats
- Funding Libyan coast guard to ‘rescue’ migrants before they can leave Libyan territorial waters
- Criminalization of NGOs and other who would help rescue migrants at sea
- Deportations
- Diplomatic pressure and economic incentives for transit and origin countries -> conditionality of development aid
- Outsourcing/offshoring of asylum (ie UK-Rwanda deal)
- Legal barriers
- Physical barriers (walls etc.)
- Detention

Those who are in Europe, aren't they the ones that are supposed to be the model human rights countries?why didn't they respect our choices then?

-25 year old male migrant from Mali, forcibly returned to Mauritania from Spain's Canary Islands

Future prospects

- Demographic realities
- Weakening of UN/collapsing aid systems
- EU itself often with tough policies, but also in some cases could be an institutional (judicial) bulwark?

Some hopeful factors:

- Pope Leo calling for compassion and for migrants to be treated with dignity
- Narrow defeat for Dutch far right in recent election
- Attempts at outsourcing asylum have failed in the past
- Whatever politicians would have you believe, integration is reality
- Migration creates economic growth

Migration is an expression of the human aspiration for dignity, safety and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family.

Ban Ki-Moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nations

Recommended reading

